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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001243

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: PUBLIC BATTLE FOR THE HEARTS OF TAMILS
CONTINUES

Refs: (A) Colombo 1236 and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.
Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (U) SUMMARY: President Kumaratunga apologized for the July 1983 riots in which hundreds of Tamils were killed, but tempered her apology with a call for the LTTE to apologize for its actions as well. An LTTE political official commented that Kumaratunga's public apology was driven by "political expediency rather than principles." Meanwhile, hundreds of anti-LTTE EPDP supporters carried the body of a slain EPDP politician from the east to the Norwegian Embassy to protest LTTE killings of EPDP cadre. Raising his voice against pro-LTTE TNA MPs, TULF leader V. Anandasangaree issued a statement condemning violence in the east and offered regret that the TNA MPs were silent about the killings. The LTTE needs to consolidate support in the east, and as the near-continuous stream of killings there suggest, the Tigers are willing to do whatever it takes to gain that support. END SUMMARY.

The President's Attempt to Win Over Tamils

2. (U) On July 24, President Kumaratunga apologized for the July 1983 riots in which hundreds of Tamils were killed, but tempered her apology with a call for the LTTE to apologize for its actions as well. At a ceremony in Kandy marking the 21st anniversary of the 1983 riots, President Kumaratunga stated, "We cannot forget, we cannot blind ourselves to the mistakes we have made; we will have to accept collective guilt for the wrongs, and then move forward. When I say collective guilt, I mean first the State of Sri Lanka for the horrors they perpetrated on one section of our peoples, 21 years ago and at other lesser moments, but I also mean all the others on the other side of the divide who have also used young children as suicide bombers, and killed hundreds of people and caused much suffering to other people." Kumaratunga also handed over compensation to 30 of the 937 Tamils her Presidential Truth Commission identified as having suffered in the "pogrom."

LTTE Rebuttal

3. (U) Meanwhile, on July 26 pro-LTTE website TamilNet reported LTTE Trincomalee Political Leader S. Elilan comments, "We regard... Kumaratunga's public apology for the 1983 pogrom against the Tamils as a deceptive attempt, driven by political expediency rather than principles, to placate the Tamils." He continued that the "Sinhala political leadership should come forward to agree to a permanent political solution to the ethnic conflict with a self-rule concept satisfying the legitimate aspirations of Tamils of the Northeast Province." Many Tamils in the north and east observed July 25 as a "day of mourning" to mark the anniversary of the riots. The LTTE called on the public to observe a hartal (general strike) in the north and east, and a prominent English weekender reported that the LTTE banned newspapers reporting on the President's offer of compensation to Tamils who suffered in the

riots.

EPDP Protests Against Norwegians (and LTTE)

14. (U) On July 23, hundreds of anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) supporters carried the body of a slain EPDP politician to the Norwegian Embassy to protest LTTE killings of EPDP cadre. The protesters briefly left the murdered man's coffin on the sidewalk in front of the embassy. The EPDP politician, killed by the LTTE on July 21, was the Pradeshiya Sabha (town council) leader of a village near Akaraipattu (south of Batticaloa). His predecessor (another EPDP politician) was also killed by the LTTE. The EPDP has staged similar demonstrations in the past at Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) offices in the east. Douglas Devananda, Minister of Agricultural Marketing Development, Hindu Affairs, and Tamil Language Schools and Vocational Training (North) and General Secretary of the EPDP - who was the target of the July 7 LTTE suicide bomber in Colombo - spoke at the slain politician's funeral. Press reports quoted him, "We call upon the international community, particularly the Government of Norway...to do everything possible to put an end to the endless violence of the LTTE." He also stated that the LTTE has killed 115 EPDP members since the Cease-Fire Agreement was signed in February, 2002.

TULF Leader Chimes In

15. (C) President of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), V. Anandasangaree issued a statement condemning violence in the east and offered regret that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MPs were silent about the killings. (Anandasangaree was once the leader of the TNA, but has been exiled from the party because he does not accept the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamil people. Like EPDP leader Devananda, the GSL provides protection for Anandasangaree because the LTTE has threatened his life.) Anandasangaree called upon the "parties to the peace process" to take immediate steps to halt the killings before beginning peace talks. He also stated, "As far as the Tamils are concerned, all those who had sacrificed their lives should be treated with utmost respect and not condemned as traitors merely because they belong to a group that is opposed to another."

16. (C) COMMENT: The LTTE needs to consolidate support in the east, and as the near-continuous stream of killings there suggest, the Tigers are willing to do whatever it takes to gain that support. President Kumaratunga's apology was not well-received by many Tamils, despite the widely-disseminated GSL-owned media's attempts to showcase it. The LTTE's negative response to her apology was not surprising, given Black July's important status in LTTE civil religion. The President has mentioned to the Ambassador several times her horror at what happened in 1983 and also made clear that it was the fault of the UNP and President Jayawardene who was in power at that time. Meanwhile, statements from anti-LTTE EPDP and TULF politicians are likely to be seen by the LTTE as challenges. END COMMENT.

LUNSTEAD